

WorkFirst Reexamination Workgroup

Focus Area Briefing Paper

Issue: How could the WorkFirst assessment process be improved to match up services to individual need?

Goal: Increase self-sufficiency

Description: Each WorkFirst partner agency currently provides an evaluation or assessment for the parents they serve:

DSHS

A full eJAS screening/evaluation is completed during the initial application/intake interview process. A full or partial screening/evaluation is required after job search or any other activity ends, when sanctioning and whenever a parent is not progressing. Screening/evaluation covers all the topics needed to screen for job search and evaluate deferral from employment. It helps in the development of appropriate Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) activities that will move the participant into employment.

When indicated, DSHS social workers complete an additional assessment that is more comprehensive, in-depth, and issue-specific.

ESD

The WorkFirst Work Skill Assessment is intended to determine each parent's employability and to determine the best activities they should engage in to enhance their employability and move toward employment. The Workforce Explorer and Choices CT are the primary tools used. Both are electronic assessment tools that provide results that are easily combined with labor market information.

Community and Technical Colleges (CTC)

For WorkFirst training participants, the Employability Competency System is a standardized assessment process used to assess occupational and job skill training needs. The colleges also use the CASAS test for Adult Basic Education. In addition, individual schools/programs use a variety of interest and skills inventories that may be geared for a specific Customized Job Skills Training (CJST) or a certain field of employment.

CTED / Community Jobs

The Community Jobs Assessment is completed within the first seven days and is part of the enrollment process. The assessment covers a wide range of issues that assist in the creation of an Individual Development Plan with the parent.

Cost: N/A

Background:**DSHS**

The DSHS screening/evaluation process has been improved over the years as part of eJAS enhancements. DSHS is again reviewing the eJAS screening/evaluation process to improve its effectiveness.

ESD

In 2003 the legislature mandated that ESD assess job search participants. As part of the Targeted Wage Initiative (TWI), ESD has significantly improved its work skills assessment process. The work skills assessment is an essential component of the service determination process now used in WorkSource sites to ensure that WorkFirst parents receive the appropriate level of service (intensive or core).

Research results: OFM has completed a number of field reviews of community services office (CSO) and ESD WorkFirst program activities over the last seven years. As part of the review, CSO screening/evaluation and ESD work skills assessment functions have been examined. There has been notable progress in the both agencies on how effectively they conduct evaluations and assessments.

DSHS – Last review of 12 CSOs, April 2005

“Most case managers felt that eJAS screening/evaluation was a useful tool. Staff conducted the screening/evaluation process in a variety of ways, some very effectively, others less so. Generally the quality of the evaluation/screening process was good, ranging from outstanding to poor. In some instances, case managers skillfully engaged parents in the screening/evaluation process. They effectively used the knowledge gained to supply information about community resources.In other cases, the case manager gained the necessary information but did not actively engage the parent in the process. In a few situations the process was a low-interactive checklist approach with the primary purpose appearing to be quick completion of the eJAS screens.”

This review was part of a CSD initiative to improve the intake, engagement and referral to job search process. CSD is continuing to work on this initiative.

ESD – Last review of job search sites – Phase 1 October 2003 (4 sites) and Phase 2 February 2004 (8 sites)

“The process of assessing customers appears to have inherent value beyond matching/linking customers with specific occupations and/or employers.....WorkForce Explorer appears to be too complicated to be used effectively as an assessment tool in WorkFirst job search. [Note ESD modified WorkForce Explorer and provided additional training for staff.] ...The quality of the work skills assessment process varied widely between post-pilot sites. Two sites did not meet basic assessment requirements (however, one site has already redesigned and improved its process).... All sites met the standard of conducting an assessment for full time job search customers within the first two weeks of job search....The process for interpreting assessment results needs to be strengthened.”

ESD has continued its efforts to improve the work skills assessment process as part of the enhancement of the job preparation component of job search.

OFM has not reviewed the community and technical colleges and the community jobs assessment activities.

Benefits: Assessment allows the partners to match individual parents with the most appropriate services.

Risks or unintended consequences:

DSHS

If not used appropriately (i.e. over emphasis on barriers vs. strengths), screening/evaluation can result in parents being improperly deferred or referred to services other than job search.

Implementation issues: OFM reviews have found a wide variation between sites in the quality of the screening/evaluation and work skills assessment process.

Issues for Further Inquiry:

- Effectiveness of eJAS Screening/Evaluation in helping to develop a plan to move parent as quickly as possible to job search and employment (strength based vs. deficit based)
- Possible duplication and redundancies between CSO screening/evaluation and social worker assessment
- Referring all parents immediately to job search and implementing a more comprehensive universal assessment process as part of initial job preparation activities